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**HELGA KROSS: Foregrounding Estonian Translators**  
*The Fall of the House of Usher* and “Usheri maja Hukk”  
**BA thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

Nowadays, it is a common practice for the translators to stay invisible in their work and the society. The aim of this thesis is to compile a biography, bibliography and analyse the translational handwriting of an Estonian translator Helga Kross, based on her translation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

The thesis consists of two parts: literature overview and empirical analysis. Literature overview discusses the importance of the translator as an intersection between the source and target culture with main emphasis on translation theories by Anthony Pym and Anne Lange. The empirical part analyses Helga Kross' translation poetics based on "Usheri maja Hukk", and provides a comparison of her and Johannes Aavik's translations of the same text.

Helga Kross' translation style follows the norms of 1980s translation strategies in Estonia, its distinctive features being translator's invisibility and staying as identical as possible to the original text. Johannes Aavik's translation poetics is less oriented to the source text, which is customary to the translation norms of the 1930s. He takes advantage of Poe's liking with descriptive vocabulary and uses it in his own language-reforming means.

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## INTRODUCTION

Translation studies traditionally focuses on the translation process, and is widely based on hypotheses on certain translation aspects. Only during recent times, scholars have shown interest in researching the translator itself, instead of the translation or translation process. Anthony Pym is one of the greatest supporters of this approach, suggesting that in order to get answers to questions such as why translations were even produced in a particular space and time, it is important to start from the translator (1998: 9).

Translators themselves mostly prefer to stay invisible and this is one of the reasons why they are generally unknown to the greater public, however famous their translated work may be. In this thesis, I am going to rediscover an Estonian translator Helga Kross, who has translated works by Edgar A. Poe, John Galloway, Thomas Hardy and many more.

The first part of this thesis gives a literature review on the topic of translator's invisibility, their role in a culture, and why it is important to research them. In the second part, I will analyse Kross' translation on the basis of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*. As this short story has also been translated by Johannes Aavik in 1926, I will additionally provide an analytical comparison of the two translations, and the authors' translation poetics in the final subsection of the thesis.

# **1 Theoretical Background**

## **1.1 Translation Studies**

David Bellos, an English translator, has played around with the idea of a world in which there are no translations (Bellos 2011: 12). If we wanted to understand something written in another language, we could simply learn it. However, there are around seven thousand languages spoken in the world and the human mind is generally capable of mastering only five to ten of them (Bellos 2011: 13). This is why we need translations.

Translation studies in its disciplinary identity focuses on the translation process, not the translation itself. According to Lange (2015: 8), this also applies to historical translations, in which the bases of research are generally the length of translation process and the assumed or known source text. The main question in the process-researching method is often “Why has the translator decided to choose that?” (Lange 2015: 10) In general, there is no common correct answer. Translation studies are widely based on hypotheses on certain translation aspects. Essentially, we could say that translation studies consist of researching the invisible. Translation studies have plenty in common with culture studies, studying not only the source text, but also the influences the surrounding cultural situation has had on the translator’s choices.

During recent times, several scholars have taken interest in studying the translator itself. Anthony Pym (1998: 9) believes that translation history is supposed to explain why translations were produced in a particular time and place. In order to find answers to these questions, the central object of translation studies should be the human translator. Only through them it is possible to find answers to that question. In addition, it is important to look how the translator relates to the rest of the world and society, and what they consider important and relevant. (Lange 2015: 12).

There are two things that need to be considered when studying a translator - the social causations of the time, and their own inner motives. According to Pym (1998: 171), for almost every inner causation there is a wider, social one. Neither one can be properly understood without the other, meaning that the translators' private lives should not become black holes, but they appear important in terms of research. Translation process consisting of translating, editing, and publishing, as every other social system, is dynamic and changes in time. Pym believes that even if a system is capable of reproducing itself and texts are made from texts, the creator behind them is still entirely human (Lange 2015: 17).

Pym believes, as does Lange, that if we consider a human translator to be at the centre of our research, we mostly deal with subjective approach and it is not a bad thing (Pym 1998: 10). According to Lange (2015: 10), it is important not to get too caught up in theory in the research process and make sure that it does not restructure the research object. There is often no single correct answer in researching translations through translators as one might find contradictions in the translator's notes and the translation itself, for instance.

Most of the translations are born from greater social causations that can be discovered by researching the events of the time the translations were made, texts together with contexts. The books translated and published during the Soviet occupation period in Estonia, for instance, can tell us plenty about the country's ideological and cultural situation. Thus, translation history can be resourceful for the political and sociological studies of international relations and translators can serve as leaders in explaining past events (Pym 1998: 165).

In addition to social causes of the period, the birth of each translation is also affected by the translator's inner motives. By looking into the translator's personal biography, one may find answers to many questions. According to Pym (1998: 166), there

are two important questions to ask. First, why do they begin translating and secondly, why do they stop? Most translators begin because of their interest in literature, and work as translators for extra income. Research has shown that a great number of translators stop translating after a while as they feel like they are losing their own voice. They are so busy rendering someone else's words and thoughts that their own seem to be left in the background. This is also the reason why many translators turn to be writers, instead.

In case of Estonia, Lange (2015: 18) has mentioned in her study that in the past, a remarkable percentage of literary translators had been writers beforehand. In translation, they tend to stick to the developed rules and linguistic structures of the target language, but remain curious in finding new equivalents in case of the untranslatable. Nowadays, most of the translators also have other levels of expertise and translating is merely a way of broadening their horizons or, understandably, earning extra money. A translation being published is an important event in our relatively young culture, and it has a great effect on the literature of the target culture.

## **1.2 A Translator as Cultural Intersection**

According to Lange (2015: 15), Boriss Reizov has said, "After a piece of art has been created, it ceases to exist as creation and lives on as perception". Lange develops this statement, saying that understanding a translated work or creating a perception of it is not only up to the reader and their personal experiences, but rather their national traditions and the levels of social and cultural development. The translators have a great role in creating that perception. They are the intersections between two cultures: the source and the target culture. Torop (2011: 98) says that translators work on the border of language, culture and society. It is up to them to decide whether foreign should remain foreign, or should it be

localised. In doing so, they seize to be simply mediators because of their unique capability to create new languages to describe foreign language, text or culture.

A translation is a social phenomenon that cannot exist independently. It is always in correlation with other social systems, such as politics, legislation, art, and religion. Translation and culture are two terms that inevitably belong together - translation is a cultural and culture a translational phenomenon (Torop 2011: 193). Anthony Pym (1998: 177) has given a name for this phenomenon of translation, called *interculturalism*. Translators, by virtue of their language knowledge, are easily able to move between different countries and cultures. Pym suggests that this might mean “translators are never *in* a culture or a society, not even when they appear more French than the French”. *Interculture* is a term used to refer to practices and traditions in overlaps of cultures, where people combine something of several cultures at once. It is not to be confused with multiculturalism or cross-cultural transfers. If traditional translation model can be seen as the movement from source culture to a translator to a target culture, then according to Pym’s point of view, in the centre of interculturality stands the translator. This means that instead of starting and ending with cultures, the movement starts and ends with the translator (Pym 1998: 172). This once again justifies considering the translator as the centre of translation research.

However, the understanding of this area wavers from one extreme to another. Lawrence Venuti is one of the academics amongst those believing that translators belong to the target culture (Venuti 1995: 20). He suggests that translators should remind readers of “the unbridgeable gap between cultures”. This belief is confronted by Pym with an argument that if there exists an unbridgeable gap between cultures, it would put the translators in the position of a bridge themselves, essentially confirming his theory of interculturality (Pym 1998: 181).



According to Lange (2015: 11), translators do more than just translate. They take part in the societal processes in general. In Estonian literary tradition, for instance, a great language scholar Johannes Aavik and his translations have had an enormous impact on modernizing the Estonian language and culture. He has said “every word, no matter which language it comes from, is transferrable into Estonian” (Lange 2015: 12). David Bellos (2011: 98) also believes that continuing translated works in particular fields always shape the receiving language in a way, and it is not just a matter of vocabulary.

### **1.3 Translator’s (In)visibility**

Many translators prefer to remain invisible in their works, keeping the main focus on the author itself. Lawrence Venuti believes that a translator should not belong in the shadows. Several problems, such as small fees for the translators, origin in the translator’s invisibility. Venuti (1995: 5) brings examples how the most valued trait in translation in the eyes of critics is fluency. A fluent translation is written in a current, widely used language, and avoids the use of foreign words. It is a text “so transparent that it does not seem to be translated”. Based on Venuti’s research, invisibility and transparency seems to be a trend in English translations (1995: 5).

However, Lange (2015: 13) explains that no matter how hard the translator tries to stay invisible, it is nearly impossible. Just as each person has his or her own unique handwriting, so does a translator. In the analysis of different literary works, it has been noted that in translation, there is always one additional participant - the translator. The voice of a translator is always there, more or less noticeable. A couple of decades ago, it was more common for the translator to write a foreword, describing the author and cultural context of the source text, and explaining some of their translation choices. Nowadays, it is

not as prevalent as publishers often do not require them, due to lack of money or general interest by the readers.

Even with the vast development of translation centres and programs at universities, founding of translation committees and awards, in Venuti's opinion (1995: 8), the translators receive minimal recognition for their work. The translator is often subordinated to the author, both in legal terms and literary criticism reviews. This is one of the reasons why I have chosen to write my thesis on this specific topic, and to discover a "forgotten" Estonian translator.

#### **1.4 Biography of Helga Kross**

Helga Susanna Kross (maiden name Roos) was an Estonian translator born in Tallinn on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1917, and died on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1918. As many other Estonians during the Soviet occupation, she spent nearly a decade of her life in Siberia. Her translator's career began after arriving in Estonia in the second half of 1950s. There is not much documented information available about her life but fortunately she has given a radio interview to Vilma Jürisalu in 1991 in which they discussed Helga's childhood, the life in Siberia, and her career as a translator.

Helga Kross first started school in a small primary school in Tallinn and later studied at Hans Kubu Private Gymnasium. Despite all the general confusion in the country, Helga has described her childhood as a pleasant time. There were two compulsory foreign languages taught at the secondary school - Russian and English. As her other classmates had already been studying English for a while, Helga had to hire a private tutor. This is where her interest in languages began as she learned a whole year's worth of material in only a couple of months. However, she enjoyed reading in English more than speaking, simply because there were not enough opportunities to practice.

Helga Kross enrolled in the University of Tartu in 1936, studying German and English language in the Faculty of Philosophy. The university structure was quite different during that time. Every student had to choose 4 courses; each of them had lower, middle and upper levels. In order to graduate, one needed to gain at least 7 points and to obtain a degree at least one of the courses had to be on upper level. Helga chose upper level English, but unfortunately never graduated as the World War II broke out before in 1941.

In the radio interview (1991), Helga looks back at her time at the university. She remembers that the classes were not mandatory and they did not cover the whole material, so she had to do much of independent work. Among the professors, she mentions one of German and one of Dutch heritage that she remembers most clearly. Some of the students gathered in an English Society that came together every week to practice their speaking skills. Helga and her friend only visited once, because it seemed so strange to suddenly converse in English when everyone could also speak Estonian. In there, they “stayed silent for an hour, but in English”.

During the Soviet occupation period, she spent a year as a teacher in Viljandi and Tallinn, teaching the German language. However, she did not feel that it was a suitable profession for her and went on to work at the Museum of History in Tallinn. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1945, the first arrests began. Helga and her co-workers were accused of organizing an exhibition for the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Soviet Estonia. In the interview, Helga explains that there were some trophy guns exhibited at the museum, which led to the women’s arrest for hypothetical crimes that could have been committed with the guns.

Helga Kross was sent to Siberia, a town called Ivdel. She stayed there for 5 years, after which she was moved to Krasnoyarsk Krai. Her main occupations there were in factories or working in the forest, most of the work being physical. However, her time spent there, according to Kross herself, was not all bad. She said that she enjoyed the

nature, the calm of the forests. She was granted amnesty in July 1954, a year after Stalin's death.

Helga enjoyed reading throughout her life. In her childhood, she did not have many books at home as they were quite expensive, so she was a frequent visitor at libraries. In Siberia, books also served as main means of entertainment. Her career as translator started soon after arriving back from Siberia. Helga started translating for an Estonian literary periodical *Loomingu Raamatukogu*, which publishes works of well-known authors all over the world as affordable paperback editions.

### 1.5 Bibliography of Helga Kross

Helga Kross has translated from both German and English, and also one book from the Russian language. Besides her translated works, Kross has published a great number of collected works by other authors. Her first published translation was by Bertolt Brecht, *Kalendrijutud*, in 1959. Kross talked about the translation process of this book in a radio interview with Vilma Jürisalu (1991). She said that it was a great book for an inexperienced translator with its short sentences and easy language; however, this also restrained the translator in a way. During the same year, Kross also translated Vance Palmer's *Laskem linnud vabadusse*. Both of these books were published by *Loomingu Raamatukogu*.

*Loomingu Raamatukogu* started its work in 1956 as a series of belletrist literary texts, and its main mission was to introduce both Soviet and foreign progressive literature to the Estonian reader (Olesk and Saluäär 2017: 7). In order for the literature to be accessible to the people, the paperback books were quite cheap. Despite the strict yearly publishing plans, it often happened that the books had to be translated in a really short period of time as some other translator had not managed to finish their work, or the

censorship had forbidden the publishing of some other book (Olesk and Saluäär 2017: 9). This could explain why Kross and other translators often translated 2-3 lengthy books in a year. Kross worked for *Loomingu Raamatukogu* until 1980. She was considered one of the most respected English translators there, setting the bar for others (Olesk and Saluäär 2017: 19).

There are many classics amongst her translated works, such as John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, and Hermann Hesse. One of the books that caught her attention already during university was Laurence Steele's *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. Kross translated this into Estonian in 1972. When asked in a radio interview (1991), whether she would like to re-translate something from her works, she mentioned Hesse and Thomas Mann. She believes them to be exceptional works, which could always be turned back to.

## 2 Translation Analysis

### 2.1 Analysis of *Usheri maja hukk*

According to Lange (2015: 113), when comparing a translation with the original, one can discover two kinds of things. Firstly, we see aspects that are visible in black-and-white and secondly, the reasons behind those specific choices. Helga Kross' translation of Edgar Allan Poe's famous short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* was published in 1989, along with 19 other translated stories. This book of collected works ends with an afterword by Mart Helme in which he discusses the greatness and life of Poe, but gives no comment on Kross or her translation. The translator's name is only mentioned once on the title page.

Using Peeter Torop's terms, Helga Kross' translation style could be regarded as re-coding and analysing (*rekodeeriv ja analüüsiv*) (Torop 2011: 177). This means that while translating, the emphasis falls on the source text and its structure, and the translator tries to render it as accurately as possible. When comparing the source text and the translation, it is visible that Kross has tried to keep the sentences at same length, and the sentence structure more or less identical with the original. Of course, Estonian language can be demanding and it may not always be possible, but in general it is a significant characteristic of hers.

Poe's style in the original is narrative, using long sentences and plenty of remarks that are separated with dashes. This creates an atmosphere of horror and keeps the rhythm of the text relatively slow. Kross has used the same techniques in her translation, maintaining the original style. Even if longer sentences might be more difficult to follow, the desired effect carries out. For instance, Poe writes:

"I looked upon the scene before me - upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain - upon the bleak walls - upon the vacant eye-like windows - upon a few rank sedges - and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees - with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium - the bitter lapse into every-day life - the hideous dropping off of the veil."

In the Estonian language, the use of dashes is not that common as shorter sentences are easy to follow, or writers use a comma instead. In this sentence in general, Kross follows the style of Poe, however, has replaced four dashes in the middle of the sentence with a comma. Cutting the long sentences into two or three smaller ones would interfere with the rhythm of the original, and this would be inconsistent with Kross' translation strategy.

Examples like this can be seen throughout the text:

“Silmitsesin enda ees avanevat vaadet - maja ja kogu valduse lihtsaimelist maastikku, kõledaid müüre, tühja pilk meenutavaid aknaid, vohavaid lõikheinapuhmaid ja kõdunenud puude valgeid tüvesid - niisuguses ääretus hingemasenduses, mida maistest tunnetest oskan võrrelda üksnes oopiumiimast toibumisega - karmi naasmisega argiellu - loori võika langemisega.” (Kross 1989: 28)

## 2.2 Grammatical Features

Kross' translation follows the rhythm and sentence structure of the Estonian language, where a verb usually takes the second place in a sentence. Estonian language offers plenty of room for variety when translating modal verbs, and Kross has taken great advantage of it. The most common equivalents for 'can' and 'could' in her translation are 'suutma', 'võima', and 'saama'. This of course depends on the context and content of the sentence. In several cases, the modality in a sentence has not been translated, but it does not significantly affect the meaning. For example, the sentence "... and I could only perceive that a far more than ordinary wanness had overspread the emaciated fingers through which trickled many passionate tears." (Poe 1839: 11) is translated as "... ja ma märkasin ainult, et ta kõhnad sõrmed, mille vahelt tilkusid kirglikud pisarad, olid muutunud tavalisest veelgi kahvatumaks." (Kross 1989: 33) The modality is left out because it would sound strange in Estonian in this context (*ma võisin ainult märgata*).

The modality of 'may' and 'might' is commonly translated to 'võima', 'võib-olla' or any other Estonian equivalent showing uncertainty. For instance, in the sentence "... and

I indulged a vague hope that the excitement which now agitated the hypochondriac, might find relief (for the history of mental disorder is full of similar anomalies) even in the extremeness of the folly which I should read.” (Poe 1839: 9) the modality ‘might’ is translated into “*leiaks ehk leevendust*” (Kross 1989: 32), using the conditional mood. Modal verbs ‘should’, ‘will’, and ‘must’ are nearly always translated in the indicative mood as it represents the certainty, which must convey into the translation.

However, there is one instance in which the difference between ‘shall’ and ‘must’ gives an important impact in the original, but is left out in the translation. Poe writes (1839: 9): ““I shall perish,” said he, “I *must* perish in this deplorable folly.”. The italics emphasize the sealed fate of the character, but the translated sentence does not have a similar effect - ““Ma hukkun,” ütles ta, “see haletsusväärne meeletus hukutab mu.” (Kross 1989: 32) Possibly, Kross has thought that the words *pean hukkuma* would not work in this case. Instead, she changes the viewpoint or perspective, and the subject of the sentence, which is a topic I will more thoroughly discuss later.

In general, the tense has not been changed in translation. There are only a couple of instances where the perfect tense is translated into past or present simple, e.g. “Its evidence - the evidence of the sentence - was to be seen, he said, (and I here started as he spoke) ....” (Poe 1839: 16) is translated as “Et see nii oli - et kivid aistmisvõimelised olid - seda näitas, nagu ta ütles (ja nende sõnade juures ma võpatasin) ...” (Kross 1989: 37). In Estonian, the sentence has more certainty, but it does not affect the meaning. Kross also has a tendency to leave out the words ‘olema/oli/olles’ when translating past perfect tense, e.g. “Having deposited our mournful burden upon tressels within this region of horror, we partially turned aside the yet unscrewed lid of the coffin, and looked upon the face of the tenant.” (Poe 1839: 17) translates to “Asetanud kurva kandami selles jubedas paigas



leiduvaile pukkjalgadele, nihutasime kõrvale veel kinni kruvimata kirstukaane ja silmitsesime seeslamaja nägu” (Kross 1989: 39).

This last example also displays how the Estonian language does not require to stress who did something, rather it is visible in the verb itself (we turned/*me asetasime*). Kross uses this language advantage quite frequently, which avoids unnecessary repetitions and smooths the flow of the text. This avoidance of repetitions in the language also shows in an example, where Kross translates “If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher” (Poe 1839: 12) into “Kui eales ükski surelik on maalinud ideed, siis on see Roderick Usher” (1989: 34), using the pronoun ‘see’ instead of repeating ‘mortal’.

An advantage that the Estonian language does not have, however, is gender pronouns. In the English version of the short story, Poe has often made the distinction between female and male characters with pronouns, not having to repeat their names. In the translation, Kross has opted, for the sake of clarity, to write out characters’ names at most cases, even if the use of Estonian pronoun ‘*ta*’ would not have caused confusion. In the sentence “I could not help thinking of the wild ritual of this work, and of its probable influence upon the hypochondriac, when, one evening, having informed me abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more ...” (Poe 1839: 16), Kross has opted to translate the pronoun ‘he’ to ‘Usher’, even if he has been referred to as ‘hypochondriac’ before.

For the sake of clarity, Kross also tends to replace pronouns ‘it’, ‘this’, ‘these’ etc. with their respective nouns. “... I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature ...” (Poe 1839: 6) is translated to “... uurisin tähelepanelikult hoone tegelikku välisilmet. Loss jättis ...” (Kross 1989: 30). The use of a pronoun would be acceptable in the translation, however, the word ‘*loss*’, in a way, conveys the more implicit meaning or picture behind the text that the readers of the original may not get. Although,

one might argue whether it is the translator's imagination that is becoming evident there, as the word 'castle' has never been mentioned in the original.

In order to maintain a natural flow of the translation, translators often have to play around the viewpoint of the sentence. As briefly mentioned before, Helga Kross often uses the technique of changing the perspective in a translation. This, also called modulation, is a widely used and recognized translation technique (Lange 2015: 160). In Kross' translation, there are two types of modulation - using affirmation when the source text uses negation and vice versa, or changing the subject or the object of the sentence in the translation.

There are several instances where Kross translates the original into its antonym as it makes more sense in Estonian. For example, in the sentence "Our books - the books which, for years, had formed no small portion of the mental existence of the invalid - were ..." (Poe 1839: 16), 'no small portion' is translated into '*moodustanud kaaluka osa*', as something like '*mitte väikse osa*' would sound unfamiliar in the target language context. Similarly, Poe's "... gave us little opportunity for investigation ..." translates to "... ei lasknud ümbrust lähemalt uurida". This still conveys the original meaning but in a straight manner, perhaps also helping to bring out the implicit content of the text.

Besides the affirmative/negative aspects, Kross quite often plays with the subject and object of the sentence. For instance, Kross translates the sentence "Completely unnerved, I leaped to my feet; but the measured rocking movement of Usher was undisturbed." (Poe 1839: 24) to "Täielikult endast väljas, kargasin jalule; Usher aga õõtsutas end ikka ühtlases rütmis edasi-tagasi." (Kross 1989: 43) In the original, the subject is the 'rocking movement', however, in the translation, Usher himself becomes the subject, rocking back and forth. This change is once again justified regards the natural flow of the translation.

In addition to these two methods of modulation, there is another aspect that is common to the Estonian language and Kross' translation. In the sentence "I learned, moreover, at intervals, and through broken and equivocal hints, another singular feature of his mental condition." (Poe 1839: 10) the main character describes his findings in the first person perspective. However, in the translation, Kross (1989: 33) opts for a different approach: "Peagi selgus katkendlikest ja kõhklevaist vihjeist veel teinegi iseloomulik joon tema vaimses seisundis." By losing the first person perspective of the narrator, the sentence becomes simply a descriptive one.

### 2.3 Lexical Features

In the previous section, Kross' translation style was described as recoding and analysing, meaning that she tends to follow the strict sentence structure and form of the source text, yet adhering to the Estonian language logic. However, the lexical choices give a translator considerably more room for creativity and interpretation. For a long time, scholars have tried to find the reason why people prefer one translation to another. Torop (2011: 188) believes one of the most important reasons to be the fluency and consistency of the translation, combining both linguistic and semiotic aspects. Obviously, it is also one of the hardest to explain and find examples for. A good translation should help the reader, using their imagination, easily visualise the content of the source text. Kross manages to do so via multiple techniques.

One of the first tasks for a translator is creating the right atmosphere for the reader. This requires at least some knowledge about the time and place the source text is taking place at. Torop (2011: 153) says that the author's historical time, the time that the events take place, and the cultural time are three different categories. Linguistically, the easiest way to transfer the reader into the right time is to use the vocabulary of that time. *The Fall*

*of the House of Usher* was originally written in 1839, however, the storyline itself is quite timeless, which makes the task easier for the translator.

Poe is well known for the element of ‘gloom’ in his stories, which is strongly based on descriptive vocabulary and alliteration, which Kross has occasionally tried to follow. Poe first sets the mood with the description of the scenery: “During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens ...”, which Kross (1989: 28) translates quite textbook-likely into “Terve häguse, pimed ja hääletu sügispäeva, mil pilved rippusid rusuvalt madalal ...”. The House of Usher itself is described throughout the story with adjectives such as ‘melancholy’, ‘bleak’, ‘gloomy’ etc., which are translated into ‘sünge’, ‘kõle’ and once again ‘sünge’. The translations of the adjectives describing the house and the atmosphere in general tend to repeat, even if the original text uses synonyms.

Jacques Derrida has said that if one word turns into a sentence, or a word gets lost in the translation, it is a sign of failure as ideally, quality and quantity are bound (Derrida in Lange 2015: 113). Of course, this cannot be regarded as complete truth as often, translation requires, instead of translating words, translating the ideas. Once in a while, Kross has used this approach when translating Poe, as well, and it has worked well. For instance, Poe describes Usher with the words: “His reserve had been always excessive and habitual.”, which would sound too sudden when translated word for word. Kross (1989: 29) translates the sentence as “Ta oli alati olnud äärmiselt kinnine.” It is simple, but gives the idea.

A more distinctive example of translating ideas instead of words would be as follows: “His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten”. Kross (1989:29) translates these sentences as: “Ta käitus hoopis teisiti kui varem. Ta ei tegelnud enam endiste huvialadega ja näis need unustanud olevat.” She does

not talk about the vanishing manners, but rather emphasises the difference in Usher's behaviour, most likely in order to avoid repetition. While the source text implies that his old occupations were neglected *or* forgotten, Kross replaces the 'or' with 'ja' (*and*), and implies that the occupations, with uncertainty, only *seemed* to be forgotten. This is an example of an aspect or detail that the translator can slightly alter by their choice of words.

Nowadays, the quality of a translator is not solely based on their comprehension of the language. Torop (2011: 98) believes that they have to be creators, producers, marketers, critics, and even ideologists as well. As a bridge between two texts, a mediator between cultures, the translator can, and in most cases will, add a touch of their understanding of the story into the translation.

The most visible signs of a translator in the text are the comments in the footnote. These either explain or specify some aspect of the source text that cannot be entirely translated or needs additional commenting. When translating into another cultural context, the translator's notes help to explicit whatever has been left implicit in the original. For instance, in Poe's story, the main character Usher reads a church manual, the *Vigiliae Mortuorum Secundum Chorum Ecclesia Maguntia*. In our culture, this is a completely unknown work; therefore the translator has offered an explanation in the footnote, "Surnuvalvamised vastavalt Maintzi kiriku koorile".

In a less visible way, the translator can add their touch to the translated text by adding adverbs that add emphasis (Kaldjärv 2017). In the translation of the sentence, "Thus, thus, and not otherwise, ...", Kross adds the Estonian word 'just' to emphasise that this is surely the only way: "Just niiviisi, niiviisi, ja mitte teisiti ...". Another word that Kross uses to elevate the importance is 'väga', for instance "Väga võimalik, arutlesin ma, ...", when the original sentence is: "It was possible, I reflected, ...". She also loses the verb in the first part of the sentence, as it does not hold great importance. The use of such

adverbs is largely a matter of taste, and up for the translator to decide (Lange 2015: 164), however such adverbs can be said to produce coherence and thus also fluency in the Estonian text.

Kross (1989: 39) translates the sentence: “The body having been encoffined, we two alone bore it to its rest:” as “Kui surnukeha oli kirstu asetatud, kandsime selle kahekesi ilma võõra abita alla puhkepaika.” She adds ‘*ilma võõra abita*’, which stresses that the activity was done only by the two of them. The word choices also bring the text closer to the local reader; however, ‘*puhkepaik*’ in Estonian context usually stands for a graveyard, which is not the case in the original text.

In terms of formatting choices, Kross stays very close to Poe. Everything that is written in italics in the source text is the same in the translation. Poe emphasises the word ‘Fear’, nearly makes it a character, by capitalising the first letter. Kross has chosen to write the whole word in capital letters, ‘HIRMUGA’. The narrator uses a French term *ennuyé* which Kross has decided not to translate, but to give its meaning in the footnote. She also has not translated the term ‘impromptus’, but has left it in italics and added the case ending ‘de’ with an hyphen.

Just as the translators can add details to the text in the translation process, they can also leave them out. For example, Kross (1989: 39) translates the sentence “And now, some days of bitter grief having elapsed, an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder of my friend.” (Poe 1839: 18) as “Ent kui mõned päevad täis kibedat kaotusevalu olid möödunud, võis sõbra häiritud vaimuseisundis märgata olulist muutust.” In general, the original text is written in a manner that a narrator is talking about past events. This ‘And now’ represents a shift in time, bringing the reader to the present, which also elevates the level of terror. Kross leaves that out, so for the reader of the translation,

the time shift does not happen. However, it is not a major detail, perhaps this is why Kross has left it out.

Another great task or a challenge for a translator is the localisation of the source text. Every language has elements in it, which do not translate well into other languages, or sometimes a text includes hints to aspects of source culture, which the target culture would not understand. Lange (2015: 143) believes that localisation is necessary to an extent, however, a translator cannot localise everything for it would bring the textual events themselves to happen in the target culture.

In terms of places and scenery, Poe's story does not require much localisation. He does not specifically describe any plants, and the concept of a tarn (*mägijärv*) is known to an Estonian reader. Kross mainly localises the text in lexical terms. She uses plenty of local colloquial expressions, which brings the source text and the characters closer to the reader. For example, when describing the house, Poe writes: "Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation", which Kross (1989: 30) translates as "Mingit erilist varisemist aga silma ei hakanud". '*Silma hakkama*' is a well-known Estonian equivalent for noticing something. She also uses expressions such as '*pikalt-laialt seletama*', '*endast väljas olema*', '*jalamaid*'.

According to Torop (2011: 33), in a language, a translation is a finished text. In a culture, however, the text is different for each reader. One translation strategy is not better from another, and defining or analysing them should not be considered as evaluating the translation or judging the translator. Torop believes that translation quality can only be talked about when comparing two translations of the same kind with each other, which is what I will do in the next subsection.

## 2.4 Comparison of Translations by Helga Kross (1989) and Johannes Aavik (1926)

Besides Helga Kross' translation of Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, I have chosen to take a closer look at the translation by Johannes Aavik. The collection of short stories translated by him, "Hirmu ja õuduse jutud XVIII" was published in 1926, considerably earlier than Kross' translation and with a very different purpose. Aavik was a great linguist, translator and writer of his time. However, about 60 years later, Helga Kross was commissioned to provide a new translation for Poe's short stories, as Johannes Aavik's translations had become out-dated, and his linguistic modifications too excessive for some readers.

According to Mart Väljataga (2008), the most efficient translational criticism is creating a new and better translation. In some cases, the original translator or somebody else is commissioned to edit the existing translation, whereas sometimes a whole new translation is necessary. The most common reason for this is that literary piece is still canonical and the translation is considered inadequate, whether it is missing important elements of the original text or is simply linguistically out-dated (Soovik ja Vaher 2012: 126).

In case of *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the need for linguistic improvements seems to be the main reason for Helga Kross providing a new translation. Johannes Aavik's collection of Poe's short stories was published in 1926. It was a time of language reforms, and the Estonian language used by him (the vocabulary and 'y' instead of 'ü', for instance) would have certainly been old-fashioned by Kross' time, let alone nowadays.

According to Sütiste and Lotman (2016), in the 20th century Estonian literary tradition, a translator is expected to first understand the author and their work, and secondly convey it in a form that is regarded adequate. This "adequate" form is decided by



the more specific norms in different periods, but in general the content plane and the expression plane have to be in an active and dynamic relationship. A translator should not harm their balance.

While Helga Kross' translation style was previously discussed as recoding and analysing, in Torop's terms (2011), Johannes Aavik's style could be seen as transposing. This means that the emphasis is based on the content, rather than the form and sentence structure of the original. However, this does not mean that Aavik has fully abandoned Poe's style of writing and is only translating the ideas; it is still visible, but in looser terms compared to Kross.

Kaia Sisask has stated in her article (2008: 118) that in translating Poe, Johannes Aavik has had great guidance from the French writer and translator Baudelaire. Aavik used Baudelaire's translations as a secondary source as his English was not that good. This can be observed in his letters to Tuglas in 1909, where he expresses his insecurities about translating from the English language as it would be time-consuming and difficult for he had to use a dictionary (*"Poe tõlkimine saaks mulle päälegi õige raske ja aega kulutav töö olema. Juba inglise keel ise teeb palju tüli, sest et sõnaraamatut tuleb tarvitada."* Vihma 1990: 16-17) Aavik's French influences are visible in the word '*tuurid*', for example - "Olin niiviisi teinud mõned *tuurid*", which in the original is "I had taken but few turns ...". He believes "this French word sounds Estonian, so why should it not be used as a real Estonian word" (Poe 1926: 129).

The first lexical difference between the two translations lies in the title of the story. While Helga Kross has translated it as *Usheri maja hukk*, Johannes Aavik has opted for *Usheri maja langus*. An explanation for this could be that Aavik followed the dictionary equivalent of the word 'fall' or that the elements in the title did not interest him or serve his language renewal purposes, whereas Kross titled the story based on the content and her

translation choices, as she uses the word ‘*hukk*’ (Poe 1989: 32) for translating the ‘perishing’ of the main character. Moreover, the word ‘*hukk*’ forms a pleasant alliteration with the ‘u’ in Usher. Alliteration is a common theme in Poe’s writing, which Kross has probably tried to follow in her translation.

While Aavik’s sentence structure may be slightly different from the original and has been influenced by the French translation, he still generally follows the length of sentences and paragraphs. Aavik uses the same techniques to maintain the steady rhythm of the text, the generous use of dashes. However, occasionally he has translated two sentences into one or longer sentences into two, for instance: “Vana raamat, mis olin haarand, oli sir Launcelot Canning’i *Mad Trist*. Olin seda Usheri lemmikraamatuks nimetand enam halvaks naljaks kui tõsiselt, sest tõepoolest selle harimata ja kaines lavepärasuses oli vähe, mis võis pakkuda huvi mu sõbra ylevale ja ideaalsele vaimsuselle.” Originally, Poe (1839: 21) has written: “The antique volume which I had taken up was the “Mad Trist” of Sir Launcelot Canning; but I had called it a favourite of Usher’s more in a sad jest than in earnest; for, in truth, there is little in its uncouth and unimaginative prolixity which could have had interest for the lofty and spiritual ideality of my friend.”

This sentence is also a great example of Aavik’s lexical choices, which are quite content-based, not always literal or dictionary entries. Kross translates the words ‘uncouth and unimaginative’ as ‘pentsik ja puine’, once again displaying her following Poe’s alliteration, while Aavik has opted for ‘harimata ja kaine’, which in today’s context seem peculiar. The word ‘lavepärasus’ is Aavik’s own creation, which he has defined as ‘rohkesõnalisus, laialdus’. Aavik has not translated the “Mad Trist”, which in fact is not a real book but also Poe’s invention (Sato 1987: 11). Kross has named it “Meeletu kurbtus” in her translation.

Johannes Aavik is known for his language reforms, and his fascination for creating new words and grammatical forms in the Estonian language is very clear in his translation. Poe's stories are known for creating an atmosphere of 'gloom', which is achieved by portraying the scenery with various descriptive vocabulary as well as the alliteration of recurring sounds. Aavik has taken full advantage of this aspect in his word-creation. Nearly every page has a footnote with Aavik's explanations for the new words, which also makes the translator more visible to the reader. His proposed words that are still widely used today include such as 'siirus', 'kirgas', 'tavatu', 'nakatama', etc., some of which can also be found in Kross' translation, however, not in entirely same place as Aavik first suggested. Kross often relies on more common equivalents, and does not smother the reader with novelties.

The collection of short stories ends with Poe's biography written by Aavik, and a note at the back of the book titled "Keele kohta", where Aavik explains his linguistic choices, the new vocabulary, and his proposed grammar rules. He takes pride in his accomplishment of shortening Poe's sentences even if English is known for its short words and sayings (Poe 1926: 128). Aavik also provides the reader with explanations on various regional or cultural aspects of the source culture, American cities or famous artists. This is a strong implication that the desired invisibility of translators is largely a trend of recent times.

In their poetics of translation, both Aavik and Kross stay loyal to the translation norms of their respective times. In the 1930s, the translation norms were looser, and the translator could treat the text in a more casual manner. This explains why Johannes Aavik is not too focused on Poe's original structure and techniques, but rather leaves a strong implication of his own handwriting in the translation. However, by Helga Kross' time the norms had changed, and the translator prefers to stay invisible, which displays in her

attention to detail, Poe's techniques such as alliteration, and the general idea of keeping the text as close to the original as possible.

## CONCLUSION

For a long period, translation studies in its disciplinary identity has focused on the translation process, not the translation itself. However, many scholars have now opted for a different approach, choosing the translator as the main object of research. Studying the translator and the period of time they worked in helps us understand the wider political and social, also inner causations behind the translation.

Estonian translator Helga Kross translated texts by many famous authors, such as John Galloway, Thomas Hardy, Hermann Hesse, and many more. By analysing her translation of Edgar Allan Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher*, it is visible that in her translation poetics, Kross maintains the translator's invisibility and tries to keep the structure and lexical aspects of the original where possible.

Comparing Kross' translation with Johannes Aavik's, it is clear that the translation norms have changed over time, which is the reason why Helga Kross was asked to provide a new translation in the first place. Aavik does not follow the original text as closely, and uses many aspects of Poe's to his language-reforming advantage.

Perhaps, Kross has translated Poe's ideas with greater accuracy, but Aavik's work has had great influence to the Estonian language overall. In general, it cannot be said that one translation is better than the other as it is a matter of norms and translation poetics of the time. Focusing on the translator itself gives us a better view of the current situation, and may explain the reasons behind their choices.

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## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Ketlin Vessart**

**HELGA KROSS: Foregrounding Estonian Translators. *The Fall of the House of Usher* and “Usheri maja Hukk” / HELGA KROSS: kaardistades Eesti tõlkijaid. *The Fall of the House of Usher* ja “Usheri maja Hukk”**

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### Annotatsioon:

Bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on uurida lähemalt eesti tõlkijat Helga Krossi, tema elulugu ning tõlkepoetikat Edgar Allan Poe lühijutu “Usheri maja Hukk” põhjal. Lisaks võrdleb autor Helga Krossi ning Johannes Aaviku sama teose tõlkeid.

Töö koosneb kahest osast: kirjanduse ülevaatest ning empiirilisest analüüsist. Esimene osa keskendub tõlkija rollile kultuuri edasikandjana ning nähtamatusele ühiskonnas. Teine osa sisaldab Helga Krossi tõlkepoetika analüüsi ning tõlkevõrdlust Johannes Aavikuga.

Bakalaureusetööst selgub, et Krossi eelistab oma tõlkepoetikas jääda nähtamatuks ning püüdleb identsuse poole originaaltekstiga. Krossi ja Aaviku tõlkepoetikad on küllaltki erinevad. Aavik suhtub tõlkesse vabamalt, mis on omane tema ajastule, ning kasutab Poe’le iseloomulikke aspekte enda keeleuuenduslikel eesmärkidel.

### Märksõnad:

Tõlketeadus, eesti tõlkijad, Helga Kross, Edgar Allan Poe, Johannes Aavik, tõlkeanalüüs



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